

Dear Mayor Weinberger;

I seek the position of Chief of Police because I love this city and her people, and this department and the men and women in it, and I know I can contribute to them all—and because, having served as the acting Chief during crisis and tumult, I know I can fulfill the role better than anyone else.

On October 1st, 2018, I came home to Vermont, where I was born and raised, to take an oath as the Deputy Chief of Operations for the Burlington Police Department. Returning to the city in which I was born—where my parents taught for more than three decades, where my wife, Vonnie, and I have burrowed into a new house and civic life, where our children go to public school—was a dream long in the making. I did not expect it to turn out quite this way, of course. After barely a year, in December 2019, you asked me to take the role of acting Chief of Police owing to a crisis. I hope I did not let you down. Then, along with Interim Chief Morrison, we navigated that storm, only to find ourselves tempest-tossed again, first by COVID-19 and then by racial justice protests following the murder of George Floyd. Since June 2020, when you asked me to be acting Chief once again, just weeks before the BPD was defunded by attrition, I have worked 55- and 60-hour weeks steering the BPD through the most pronounced crisis in its living memory.

Police exist to keep people safe, by preventing or responding to crime and disorder, with and for their neighbors. The prevention and response must be equitable and procedurally just, and collaborating with neighbors must be done in a manner that fosters police legitimacy. That’s the mission, and everything police do should contain some aspect of that. We intervene when people harm others (or themselves). We respond when others feel unsafe. We ensure that people adhere to the laws designed to protect lives, property, and the shared public order—shared order that allows everyone to partake equally and freely in our public space.

January 2021 marked sixteen years since I joined the policing profession, and dedicated myself to the proposition of keeping people safe. For the past fifteen months I have been the BPD’s acting Chief of Police; for seventeen months before that I was the Deputy Chief of Operations. Prior to that, **I served as an assistant commissioner (two-star rank) on the executive staff of the country’s largest police department;** as a patrol supervisor in a challenging, vibrant Manhattan precinct of 120,000 people; as a special projects detective; and as a police officer, field training officer, and field intelligence officer in public housing in the Bronx. I was also a risk consultant at the highest levels of the private sector, advising Fortune 100 CEOs and boards. I am a graduate of Harvard University (AB, 1995) and the Harvard Kennedy School (MPA, 2013).

Since coming home to Burlington, I’ve been a visible leader, as well as an active and collaborative participant in the Burlington community. **This city was and is my home: I know it from Leunigs to Lyric, from the Roxy to Rock Point, from the Hill Section to the Waterfront.** I know its history too, from terrible things like the Kake Walk (still an open sore and not old history when my father started teaching at UVM) to wonderful things like the original Reggae-fest to new things like Highlight and Juneteenth. As a student and practitioner of criminal justice, I know it from old turning-point crimes like the murders of Melissa Wells or Michelle Gardner Quinn to the new dynamics driving our recent uptick in gunfire incidents.

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The “Burlington Police Chief Search Public Engagement Report” has a long list of qualities the City seeks: professionalism, integrity, transparency, community engagement, and cross-cultural competency. The Chief must be prepared to focus on racial justice, de-escalation tactics, officer wellness, restorative public safety, recruitment and retention, a strategic vision, and police transformation. (In addressing these, below, it must be acknowledged that, as a Chief, “I” is often “we”; I owe Deputy Chiefs Labrecque and Sullivan, EA Trammell, and the executive leadership great debts.)

- **Professionalism:** I stand proudly on my record of professionalism and integrity. In a polarized age, no public figure can assuage every constituency, but I have served all equally, and my tenure has been marked by leadership stability. (The storms we have sailed have not been of my making.)
- **Transparency.** From press releases, to appearances at NPAs and public meetings, to working first with our in-house analyst and then with the Department of Innovation & Technology on new data reports and an online data dashboard, I’ve enhanced transparency. I have also significantly expanded information sharing with the Police Commission—notably the monthly public release of every BPD use of force. I have also nearly doubled the number of department directives available online.
- **Community engagement.** This has been much harder over the past year, owing to the pandemic, but I’ve led the Citizen’s Academy and been available for City and Lake, Leadership Champlain, AALV, Parents Academy, and other groups to foster community engagement. I have met and conferred with community members like Patrick Brown, Jacob Bogre, Sandy Baird, and with the young men representing “The Black Perspective.” As Chief, continuing these meetings, building on them, and resuming and improving events like the clergy luncheon is a high priority for me in the next months.
- **Cultural competency and racial justice.** I’ve built on more than fifteen years of anti-bias and cultural competency training at BPD by implementing iterative trainings on racial bias with Treste Loving of the Institute For Racial Equity, in which officers trained on their regular shifts to have productive conversations with their coworkers on this complex topic. I’ve also promoted minority officers to supervisory ranks. And I am already working with the training cadre to build on work done by the South Burlington Police and VSP on lessons about historical racial injustice centering on the 13th and 14th Amendments, as well as law enforcement’s legacy around America’s original sin. We also continue to track and analyze racial disparities that appear in arrests and uses of force. The degree to which these equate with bias is unclear, and incident-level analysis that is now possible owing to sharing use-of-force incidents has not revealed obvious patterns. But by diminishing the absolute number of all these incidents, we are making an impact on the incidence of disparities, if not the rates. Furthermore, the success demonstrated by the near elimination of bias in traffic stops and traffic tickets, which is continuing into 2021, is noteworthy.
- **Deescalation.** With direct input from citizens on the Committee to Review Policing Policies, I wrote a new, best-in-the-state use-of-force directive to emphasize de-escalation in the same way we already emphasize it in the field. But deescalation is strategic, as well as tactical. During my tenure with the BPD, I have personally overseen the police posture for protests around Justice Kavanaugh, the Air Guard’s F-35s, migrant justice, George Floyd, Jacob Blake, and, just last night, Israel and BDS. Throughout these, there has been no disorder, and no arrests (aside from some civilly disobedient folks I cited for trespass in Senator Leahy’s office). During the COVID-19 pandemic, I prioritized education and engagement instead of enforcement. I did so during the racial justice protests, as well, because I had a keen sense of what would and would not be escalatory. (I believe I displayed that sense again last night in decisions made around the

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BDS protest.) A *New York Times* [article described](#) how many cities' police departments aggravated the protests. If that analysis is right, then the inverse is, as well. From the earliest days of the crisis following George Floyd's murder, under my leadership and because of my tactical and strategic deployment decisions, the BPD avoided many of the missteps that bigger cities made. This was true of the encampment and of protests at the Mayor's home that I policed alone rather than deploying officers.

- **Officer wellness.** I've won the respect of the men and women I'm privileged to lead. The BPOA's endorsement (attached to this application) is proof. I've earned their support because they know I understand them, but also push them, encourage them, and hold them accountable.
- **Restorative public safety.** I've worked with DC Labrecque to significantly increase the number of cases we refer to alternative justice via the Burlington CJC. There are many social issues for which the solution is not handcuffs. The continued decrease in numbers of arrests and tickets is proof that leadership has inculcated this ethos in the officers.
- **Recruitment and retention.** You and I have developed a preliminary plan for this, Mayor Weinberger, although more needs to be done. Reduced staffing and continued, unprecedented attrition is the most significant crisis currently facing the agency. By next spring, the BPD will have fewer than 60 sworn officers. Getting back to the high 80s or 90s, if that is CNA's recommendation and approved by the Council, means hiring 30 officers, *assuming no one else leaves*. Historically, the best case has the BPD successfully hiring 12 officers and retaining seven per year—at that pace, with normal tenure attrition, it would take six years to hire 30 officers. So we have our work cut out for us. But I am focused on bringing in new, exemplary candidates, and want both race and gender to be important objectives (for example, I have already joined the Policing Project's 30x30 Program to increase female representation in the ranks). And I am the chair of the Entrance Test Working Group, a subcommittee of the Vermont Criminal Justice Council, seeking to create better, more valid instruments for entry into the Vermont Police Academy. It was the subcommittee's recommendation that led to the VPA abandoning the current academic test as biased and unworkable. Now we are working on finding a fair, effective replacement.
- **A strategic vision.** I created and led Vision 2020, a promising and popular example of reengineering the BPD according to the insights of those who know it best—officers and non-sworn employees who make it up, and neighbors who use its services. It was a CAT scan of the BPD, providing an internal view of how we're healthy and how we're not. Every member in every rank and every role was encouraged to participate, because the goal of the process was consensus-driven outputs. What should have come next—implementation—was forestalled by budget issues associated with the pandemic, and now with staffing/resource deficits. But Vision 2020's prescriptions deserve to be revisited, and I will do so as Chief. The recommendations can create change that belongs to everyone in the BPD, because all of us have had a role in shaping it. I also intend to rewrite the mission statement, with department and community input, and create a new mission for a new decade.
- **Police transformation.** This is a big one, and because of the BPD's staffing crisis, it will remain a big one for the foreseeable future. In many ways, the BPD has been in a situation where every day is a transformation, as we struggle with unprecedented circumstances. Nevertheless, the Public Engagement Report says, "Burlington's next Police Chief will be responsible for collaborating in the development and implementation of several police transformation processes." I'm confident I meet this requirement, because thus far, I've largely authored these processes. My [Public Safety Continuity Plan](#) has the backing of professional consultants, the public, the Mayor, and the City Council. My [Priority Response Plan](#) is a best-worst-case option for managing calls for service, and also has the backing of professional consultants.

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I've contributed to and continue to develop, with Lacey Smith, what is currently called the CAIR Plan, Burlington's effort to create a CAHOOTS-like model for addressing certain kinds of service demands.

In addition to the bullets, above, there are several other future goals I will tackle as Chief of Police. I will continue to hone and improve policy and redraft several directives—although the current revision-and-approval mechanism is unwieldy, and contributed to a certain amount of policy stagnation under the previous chief. Additionally, despite that fact that the City's own survey for the Police Chief Search Public Engagement Report ranked addressing procedural justice, culture change, and structural racism last out of 12 candidate qualities, I think these are tremendously important. As mentioned above, there are training opportunities, outreach efforts, and avenues of data analysis to pursue. And finally, I'm eager to change the way we formalize and memorialize discipline. We purchased and are implementing the BenchMark system to do this. Because although I have overseen appropriate discipline, including terminating officers for cause, and have done so in accordance with existing directives and with input from the Mayor's office, the City Attorney, the Human Resources director, and the Police Commission, we need to improve these processes.

What excites me most, Mr. Mayor, is continuing to work with amazing cops, dispatchers, and non-sworn employees on behalf of my neighbors. Together we've worked homicides, shootings, and stabbings. With them I've comforted the families of a boy who froze to death, of a man killed crossing through traffic, of people who have overdosed. We've sat in the living rooms of new Americans in the Old North End to brainstorm how to keep their kids on the right track. We've been called to homeless encampments and lakeside mansions, attended campus lectures and courtroom hearings, visited synagogues and churches, theaters and schools, ballparks and businesses. We've tackled day-to-day incidents and large events: New Year's Eve, the Vermont City Marathon, July 3rd, the Church Street Tree lighting, the PRIDE Parade, thousands of people convening on City Hall for the Climate Strike, bomb threats at Senator Sanders's office, unions rallying against former Wisconsin governor Scott Walker at the Hilton, dozens of protest marches large and small moving through downtown. There have been barricaded suspects, people in emotional distress, boisterous drunks, and a thankfully small number of truly violent and dangerous criminals from whom our neighbors deserve protection.

Sharing this story better is key to bringing the department closer to the people it serves. After all, the world feels increasingly divided, and Burlington is not immune. **But the solution to division is connection, and policing in Burlington is on the front lines where connections can happen.** Every 911 call is a chance to change the world, a little bit at a time. So I strive to find local answers to local problems. I strive to help my neighbors, to identify and face our challenges, to seek common good on common ground. At night I go home to my family, in a house and city we love, and then in the morning I go back to work to do it again.

Given the chance to do it as the Chief of Police, I know I can help make Burlington a safer, fairer place.

Sincerely,



Jon Murad

Tuesday, September 14, 2021